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ABSTRACT

Social change in the United States has prompted frequent observations that civic values, attitudes, and conduct are in a state of disrepair. One of the most often mentioned solutions to this problem is a resurgence of informed civic responsibility. A responsible citizen of a democratic society is interpreted as one who believes in the worth of the individual, the principle of freedom, and government by elected representatives. Behaviors of a responsible citizen include voluntary restraint of self interest when it conflicts with the common interest, resisting perversions of political power, working for elevation of qualified people to public office, and supporting passage of just and fair laws and policies. Several educational approaches can be taken to promote the development of citizens imbued with knowledge and commitment to democratic values. These approaches include discussing openly totalitarian regimes without denigrating the peoples or cultural achievements of any nation, practicing democratic values in schools, accepting the inherent limitations and failures of democratic institutions, stimulating interest in political philosophy, and studying life stories of individuals who exemplify the authentic spirit of democracy. (DB)

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REFLECTIONS ON DEVELOPING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS

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The topic of developing democratic citizens requires at least three basic lines of thought. First, there is an implicit assumption relative to the viability of democratic societies in the modern world. This assumption needs to be examined. Second, some explication needs to be given to the idea of a "democratic citizen." Third, some thought must be given to the methods and means of promoting the development of democratic citizens. In short, this paper will be addressed to the why, the what, and the how of the topic before us, and in the same order.

Why should the topic of developing democratic citizens be a matter of interest to us at this juncture of time and social development? Part of the answer lies in the frequent observation that civic values, attitudes, and conduct are currently in a state of disrepair in America and that the republic itself is in danger of internal decay unless there is a resurgence of informed civic responsibility on the part of all. Another part of the answer lies in the fact that democracy, as is the case with all social fabrications, is not without the threats of temporal degeneration (Max Weber's "routinization" and "cooling" of the vision), intellectual

SO 011 443

detraction, anarchic opposition, and geo-political competition.

From the standpoint of time, democracy occupies a mere moment in the history of political systems. Discounting the Athenian experiment, democracy both in theory and in practice has been almost universally rejected throughout history until the most recent 200 years. Yet, despite its relative youthfulness, democracy has its prophesies of impending demise. "Western Europe has only twenty or thirty years of democracy left in it. After that it will slide, engineless and rudderless, under the surrounding sea of dictatorship." So Willy Brandt, former Chancellor of West Germany, is reputed to have said.[1] Or, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it, "Democracies are becoming a recessive form of government, like monarchies used to be--something the world is moving from, rather than to."[2]

As to intellectual detraction, democracies of the modern world have sustained academic indictments throughout most of this century to date, ranging from the earlier charges of Robert Michels, Vilfredo Pareto, and Gaetano Mosca that representative democracy on a large scale is impossible, to the more recent intimations from departments of government or political science at American universities (?) that everything believed about democratic politics prior to World War II was "nonsense."[3] That such judgments are spoken of by Robert Dahl as being "fashionable" is in itself suggestive of the tenor of much political discourse.[4]

As to anarchic opposition to democractic governments, both theoretically (democracy is a sham, an illusion) and practically, one only has to reflect on the rise of political terrorist activity in recent years, particularly by the sons and daughters of the "caviar set" in western Europe.

Finally, from a geo-political perspective it is somewhat sobering to notice that of the 160 countries of the world only about 23 have governments which are subject to change through an unhindered electoral process. Furthermore, this percentage factor of 14 per cent has recently been shrinking--not increasing, nor is it any encouragement to know that most of the peoples of the world probably would not choose democratic governments for themselves were they given the opportunity to do so. Can democracy compete successfully as an attractive form of government among the peoples of the world? Not only is the prospect less than optimistic, it might be more appropriate to say that at the present time democracy is something of an endangered species within the political spectrum worldwide.

As to the prospects of the survival of vital forms of democracy in the modern world, let me cite Ralph Buultgens, distinguished political scientist and philosopher at the New School for Social Research.

> "Intellectual conviction and personal circumstances have long led me to believe that democracy is the most enlightened, effective, and forward-looking philosophy of government. . . . /However/, the values of democracy have little relevance for most of the world's peoples today. Of its effectiveness, there is now much doubt, and its future is more

> uncertain than at any time in recent history. I do not make these observations in a mood of pessimism, but I know that objective analysis requires an appreciation and a presentation of reality. And I have a troubling sensation that we are living in a period that future scholars may come to regard as the twilight years of democracy."[5]

No doubt, professor Buultgen's sensations are also troubling to us, for the operative ideals which we have inherited through the Judaeo/Christian tradition, through Graeco/Roman Stoicism, through Renaissance Humanism, et al., seem to require democratic forms of government for their fullest expression. So much is this the case that Walter Rauschenbusch could say that democratic government is the political expression of the Kingdom of God on earth, although I, for one, would like to keep a little more distinction between the two spheres than he.

Although the preceding reflections are something less than cheerful, they, nevertheless, give us some reason for considering the topic before us as one of some urgency.

Let me turn now to the what of our topic, i.e., how shall a democratic citizen be measured? What are his marks? Following Buultgen's lead, I will mention only three basic beliefs of the democratic citizen, to be followed by selected behaviors of the democratic citizen.

(1) The democratic citizen believes in the personhood and worth of every individual. This axiological postulate may derive from a Stoic notion that every person possesses a spark of the divine Logos; or from the Christian perception that Christ died for all; or from the Kantian notion that persons are to be treated as ends, not as means to an end.

Regardless of the source, the democratic citizen is imbued with the old Puritan dictum that "the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the richest he."

(2) The democratic citizen has a belief in the principle of freedom, both as an intellectual and as a social condition. He believes that the person and the community of persons can best develop with the fewest external controls consistent with the security and stability of the total society. Such freedom expresses itself in the several civil liberties: voluntary associations, freedom to participate in the political process, to express himself, to earn a living, to own property, to move both laterally and vertically in the society, and to worship as he pleases or pleases not.

(3) The democratic citizen believes that there is sufficient wisdom and rationality among the populace such that important matters may be resolved in free and open dabate, and such that they are competent to select their own representatives in free and contested elections, and that such representatives should be accountable to the people and serve at their collective pleasure.

It is clear that the above democratic beliefs constitute operative ideals of a high order. As we know, however, a realistic appraisal of our actual operational values and beliefs suggests that our ideals are not always fully operative. Turning now to some of the ideal behaviors of the democratic citizen, we suggest the following:

(1) He exercises a voluntary restraint on his self interests when they conflict with the larger common interests and well being of the total community.

(2) He engages in informed resistance to demagoguery and perversions of power and office.

(3) He works for the elevation of persons of quality and integrity to places of public trust.

(4) He influences the passage of laws and the establishment of policies which are just and fair.

(5) He responsibly accepts both the gifts and the demands of citizenship in a free society.

As a consequence of the fact that few, if any, of us measure up to these ideals in a perfect manner, our actual institutions of government are likewise considerably less democratic than we would like to think. Undue concentrations of power spring up now in the military, now in the industrial world, now in big labor, now in strong political figures, now in this or that special interest group. The vigilance of the citizenry in maintaining final control of their liberties constantly waxes and wanes. As the culture undergoes radical changes, so do the operative ideals which give expression to the culture and which either strengthen or weaken the sanctions of democracy, as the case may be.

Despite the fact that full and perfect freedom is unattainable in this world, yet there is a proximate, penultimate form of freedom which is not only attainable but which is also a pre-condition of the flowering of the human spirit. Even this proximate freedom, however, is elusive, and we are subject to losing it in one of several ways: (1) it may be taken from us in a political sense by governmental aggrandizement or by economic catastrophe; (2) personal freedom may be lost by default, as Eric Fromm tells us, because, overcome by the terrifying anxiety connected with determining our own lives, we often turn to the most convenient authority figure or institution which will assume managerial control over us. The desire to

"escape from freedom" is never far away from the thoroughly autonomous individual. To put it in other words, freedom exposes our ambivalence. Deprived of freedom, we yearn for autonomy; yet, when confronted with freedom, our heteronomous tendencies pull us back toward a state of dependency, of unfreedom; (3) finally, freedom pursued for its own sake alone and uninhibitively exercised seems to dissipate, devolving into some new and unanticipated form of slavery. When divorced from the governance of moral considerations, freedom may indeed be chimerical. With acute discernment, Henry Grunwald noted the paradoxical nature of freedom in a Bicentennial essay in Time magazine:

> "For freedom to be workable as a political and social system, strong inner controls, a powerful moral compass and sense of values, are needed. . . . The compass /today/ is increasingly hard to read, the values hard to find in a frantically open, mobile, fractioned society. Thus a troubling paradoxical question: Does freedom destroy the inner disciplines that alone make freedom possible?"[6]

The linkage between moral discipline and freedom was well expressed by St. Paul when he said, "I am a free man, subject to none, yet I have made myself a slave to all, that I may win some" (I Cor. 9:19).

A second watchword in the democratic tradition is that of equality. Equal status before the law and equal opportunity within the society have served as the basis for much social change during the past fifty years, resulting in new freedoms for

women, minorities, young people, the aged and the handicapped. Few would argue with the legitimacy of these changes when seen against the backdrop of democratic ideals. Yet, some are putting forward a more daring and far-reaching proposal, that is, the demand for equality of result. This view holds that the natural inequalities of birth, intelligence, and ability are inherently unfair and that justice requires social compensation for such inequalities.

Daniel Bell refers to this demand for equality of results as not simply one of rising expectations, but one of rising entitlements--"a staggering increase in the number of things people feel they are entitled to, regardless of their own productivity or contribution to the economy."[7] Massive government intervention toward the redressing of all social and economic inequalities, if pursued, would have profound consequences relative to inflation and those incentives which create capital. It would involve a "shrinking of the very income that is to be redistributed," continued growth of a managerial bureaucracy, and an increase in the power of the state over its people. The net effect would be a diminution of freedom, or else a radical redefinition of what constitutes freedom.[8]

Leibniz, a 17th century European philosopher, argued that not even God could create a world in which all goods co-exist simultaneously, inasmuch as some goods cancel out other goods. The only alternative is to select the best combination of co-possible goods. If the same logic is applied to the quest for

total and unconditioned equality of result for every individual in society, then it would appear that certain features which we have hitherto considered necessary to a free society would be nullified. In short, says Grunewald, "total equality can be enforced only by total tyranny."[9] Is it really possible to have all freedoms simultaneously? Do we not want freedom from discipline at the same time as we want freedom from crime? Can we have freedom from regulatory controls and yet have freedom from smog? If Walter Lippmann were still with us he would remind us that there is a certain necessity that is in the nature of things, the consequence being that there must be some reformation of what we want in the light of what it is possible to have. The conditions which make freedom possible may be antithetic to those conditions which make for total equality. The trade-offs cannot be avoided.

This is not to be construed as a retreat from the need to provide income support for the poor or the unemployable, nor is it a denial of the appropriateness of equal opportunity. It is merely to recognize that governmental imposition of total equality of result will come at the price of democratic and meritocratic values as we have come to know them.

The third notion in the pantheon of democratic imagery is that of fraternity. The "rugged individualism" of earlier days was sanctioned by the moral code of self reliance. We paid for the excesses of this ethic with a ravaged environment.

The "if it feels good, do it" theme of the current neo-naturalistic philosophy is not unrelated to the older ethic of individualism, with the exception that the price is different. The "do your own thing" morality is now being paid for at the price of societal and familial instability. Such individualism has its advantages in stirring up the cake of custom, overcoming cultural inertia, and counter-balancing historic periods of conformism. But inherent in the notion of society is the factor of a commonality of life. Unless there is some effort to preserve a sense of kinship, a vision of the commonwealth or "the beloved community," a qualitatively significant democratic society becomes quite problematic.

In some quarters there is much lamentation over the continuing efforts on the part of many Americans to preserve some degree of ethnic, cultural, and neighborhood identity, as if such were nothing more than disguised forms of racial exclusiveness and malevolent tactics designed to delay the emergence of a true national community. My own view is nearer to that of Andrew Greeley and Michael Novak who argue that such plural centers of cultural gravity are not incompatible with the cohesiveness of the larger society or with the notion of egalitarianism, although at times they are sources of tension. They are for the most part benign networks of kinship or cultural affinity which answer to the natural need for belonging to something more intimate and self-validating than the contrived gesellschaft associations of mass society.

But even with the legitimation of cultural diversity and pluralism, the democratic idea presupposes some larger sense of the unum, of the common good which extends beyond region, race, and class. Indeed, even in politics the very notion of the resolution of conflict between group interests and wills, that is, the quest for meaningful compromise, is hardly possible unless there are values and interests held in common and which are more dear than our respective party interests. Without this common basis for reconciliation, there really can be no politics in the best sense of the word. Thus, if democratic society requires the factor of fraternalism, how can the fraternal sensibilities be nurtured? It is a question which policy makers and social engineers would do well to ponder, so that liberty, equality and fraternity could be pursued with due consideration to the conditions of each rather than at the expense of one or the other.

In this concluding portion of the paper, let me address the how of promoting the development of democratic citizens. Obviously, totalitarian states seem to have no qualms about "educating" their subjects so that they will hold to officially promulgated values and beliefs. Indoctrination does have its pragmatic political advantages. Yet, in America we are so super-sensitive to any intimation of political indoctrination that we usually neglect to teach democratic theory and practice in the schools in any explicit, systematic way at all. As a

matter of fact, there are not a few American college students who learn less about constitutional law and democratic institutions than they do about competing ideologies such as Marxist/Leninism, Fascism, or National Socialism. Indeed, one might arrive at such a notion with a quick review of available college course offerings and titles of library books in political thought. Why is this the case? Part of the answer is due to the spirit of the times in which we live, i.e., it really isn't chic to think and speak positively about American institutions. To do so is to invite the epithets "superpatriot," "political prude," or even "fascist." But are we not discriminating enough to know the difference between national idolatry on the one hand and an unabashed but carefully reasoned apologetic on behalf of democratic principles, on the other hand?

Another part of the answer lies in the widespread belief that political science, indeed, all the social sciences, are or ought to be dispassionately pursued and kept value free. The outcome of such reasoning is, as John Hallowell puts it, a condition in which many intellectuals are "hesitant about affirming unequivocally the principles upon which a free and just society can be based."[10] It is precisely this hesitancy and vacillation of the will for which Alexander Solsenitzin admonished the American people in his commencement address at Harvard.

Let me now list, with minimum elaboration, some of the educational approaches which might be taken in order to

promote the development of citizens imbued with both a knowledge and commitment to democratic values.

First we need not be overly timid in discussing those features of competing political systems which are patently antithetic to the concepts of human dignity, justice and freedom. Surely a way can be found to do this without denigrating either the peoples or the cultural achievements of such nations.

Second, we need to find ways to practice in the classroom and on the school grounds those civic traits which correspond with the democratic spirit. However, unless students perceive such values as having been internalized in the lives of the teaching staff and exemplified in their behavior, teaching to the contrary will have little effect. Values are caught perhaps more than they are taught.

Third, we need to be honest, but not cynical or scurrilous, about the inherent limitations and failures of democratic institutions in our own society.

Fourth, we need to find ways of stimulating a reflective interest in the moral, anthropological and philosophical underpinnings of the democratic ideal, as well as the more prescriptive conditions necessary for the flourishing of democracy. Specifically, such conditions would include the following:

(1) The concept of civil liberties

(2) The principle of the rule of law

(3) Respect for duly constituted authority

(4) Rights and dignity of the individual

(5) Wariness about large concentrations of wealth, power, or unchecked authority

(6) Access to and utilization of the electoral process

(7) Freedom of speech and the rights of dissent

(8) Protection from and restraint in the use of coercive force

Fifth, young people need the morale, as well as the morality, which is inherent in the authentic spirit of democracy. Such inspiration can be found in the life stories of those who have been founding architects of democracy, in the lives of those who have made sacrifices on its behalf, and in the lives of those who have exemplified the highest ideals of service in behalf of justice, human dignity, and freedom. Surely a society committed to these ideals for 200 years ought to have produced at least a handful of public-spirited persons whose lives and labors are worthy of emulation. Is it really necessary, as seems fashionable in some circles, to debunk the Washingtons, the Franklins, or the Jeffersons, or any number of other persons from both private and public life who wrestled heroically with the claims of justice, freedom, and democracy?

As a kind of an aside relative to the kinds of books many Americans are currently reading, let me quote from Haynes Johnson, staff writer for The Washington Post. After reviewing the titles of current best-selling books, as reported by the New York Times Book Review, and finding such titles as Adrien Arpel's Three-Week Crash Makeover, Shapeover Beauty Program, The Woman's Dress for Success Book, Designing Your Face, The Complete Book

of Running, and Arnold: The Education of a Body Builder, Mr. Johnson draws the following conclusion as to who we are and where we're going as we head into the 1980's:

> "We are selfish, vain, narcissistic, insecure, introspective, overweight, ugly--and we don't give a damn about politics. Self-improvement is our preoccupation, hedonism our philosophy, looking out for No. 1 our theme. That last trait especially speaks to what passes for the politics of the moment."[11]

I would submit that unless the schools and colleges can contribute to those value formations which eventuate in the production and consumption of literature which is ethically more momentous than the titles above, then the prospects for producing more responsibly democratic citizens is not altogether encouraging.

In conclusion, let me add a word relative to the concept of responsibility, for a democracy necessitates, far more than is the case in any other political system, a profound sense of personal responsibility for the well being, security and progress of the total society. In his The Responsible Self, H. Richard Niebuhr formulates an interesting model of conduct which is considered to be responsible. First, says Niebuhr, life is constantly presenting us with actions or events which necessitate that we make a response. All action is response to action upon us. Secondly, we can not respond in a fitting or moral manner until we first have interpreted the character of the action to which we are responding. Third, the responses that we make are said to be accountable actions to the degree that

we anticipate the reactions which are forthcoming to our response. Fourth, responsible action is that which is not only response to interpreted action in anticipation of other responses to our action, it is also action which presupposes a context of social solidarity. [12]

Being a responsible citizen then means that I am capable of discerning and interpreting the events around me, that I can respond in a fitting manner, that I can initiate acts and be accountable for my conduct. It means that my actions, when linked in an appropriate way with the acts of others, in the past, the present and the future, carry meaning and influence far more than when they stand as isolated reactions to disconnected and random events. Thus being responsible enlarges my presence in the world and enhances my effectiveness.

Continuing reflection upon the requirements of values education, the formation of responsible citizens, and the promotion of democratic traits is an enterprise which demands the best from those who practice the art of teaching.

NOTES

1. Ralph Buultgens, The Decline of Democracy: Essays on an Endangered Species (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978), p. 146.

2. Ibid., p. 149.

3. John Plamenatz, Democracy and Illusion, An Examination of Certain Aspects of Modern Democratic Theory (London: Longman Group Limited, 1973), p. 3

4. Ibid.

5. Buultjens, op. cit., p. ix.

6. Cited in Buultjens, op. cit., p. 25.

7. Cited in Buultjens, op. cit., p. 27.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. John H. Hallowell, Main Currents in Modern Political Thought (New York: Henry Hold & Company, 1959), p. 2.

11. Complete article reprinted in Christianity Today (October 6, 1978), pp. 14-15.

12. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Meaning of Responsibility," in James M. Gustafson and James T. Laney, editors, On Being Responsible: Issues in Personal Ethics (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968), pp. 31-35.